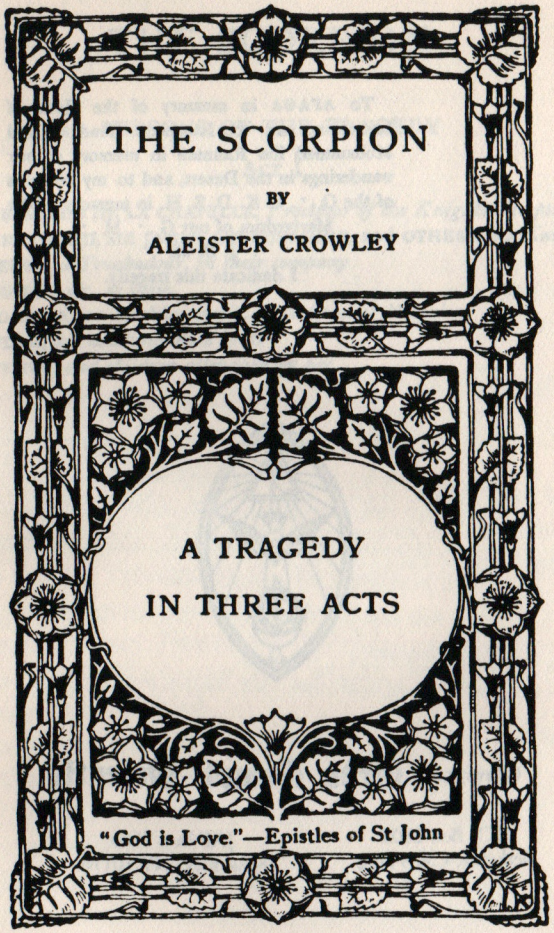
Ordo Templi Orientis

# THE SCORPION

BY

ALEISTER CROWLEY


THE SCORPION
BY
ALEISTER CROWLEY
A TRAGEDY
IN THREE ACTS
"God is Love."—Epistles of St John

To ΑΓΑΘΑ in memory of the Hour of Initiation, and to Lampada Tradam and Mohammed ibn Rahman in memory of our wanderings in the Desert, and to my brothers of the O . ·. of K. D. S. H. in memory of the Martyrdom of our G . ·. M . ·.

J. B. M.

I dedicate this tragedy.

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# THE SCORPION

## PERSONS OF THE TRAGEDY

### ACT I

SIR RINALDO DE LA CHAPELLE, *Preceptor of the Knights Templars*
SIR RAYMOND, SIR JAMES, SIR EUSTACHE, and OTHERS, *his Knights*
JOCELYN, *a Troubadour, in their company*
ESQUIRES, *etc., to these*
SAID OMAR, *an Arabian Emir. His band of Warriors*
LAYLAH, *his newly-wedded bride*
A NYMPH, *and children attendant on her*

## ACT I

SCENE: *The desert. In the foreground, a walled well with a lever. Three palms. Tall grasses. The ground is uneven. In the background other palms, among which are several military chargers, held by esquires. Around the well are Knights Templars, armed, reposing. Also* JOCELYN, *a troubadour.*

JOCELYN [*sings to his harp*]:

Noon slumbers softly in the palms;
The desert breezes whisper psalms;
And we who rest must rise and ride
Beneath the banner cruciform
That braves the Saracen and the storm,
This blessed Christmastide.
For we are hardy, and worn with blows
And battles,
And languish for our mother snows.

What is the gladness of the well
To us who pine for citadel,
And joyous burg, and Christian feast?
But we are vowed to Christ to fight
For God, our honour, and our right
Against the recreant East.



We have left our ladies, you and I,
My brothers!
To keep our castles, and to sigh!

Oh! could some holy hermit give
One short day's dalliance fugitive!
Speed hither through the enchanted air
Our ladies, for our faith's reward!
Would it not sharpen every sword
And perfume every prayer?
Love sharp as holly and pure as snow,
And kisses
Beneath the moon for mistletoe!

SIR RAYMOND. Something ill sung, Jocelyn, and too sadly, forsooth! Here the hermits are foul and malicious. I would clear the land of them.

SIR JAMES. Spies, every one. And enchanters to boot.

SIR EUSTACHE. The maids are worse, to my mind. Think of the gallant Florimond, as tall a knight of his hands as ever swung sword or couched lance.

SIR RAYMOND. Netted like a fish!

SIR JAMES. And now lives in the desert with the witch, a wild man, and banned.

SIR RAYMOND. Little better than a robber. And the word goes that he hath apostatized from our holy faith.

[ALL *cross themselves.*

JOCELYN [*sings*]

Heigho! Heigho! the Crescent and Cross!
If the one is a bargain, the other's a loss.

Who would be found
On the ground
Of Mahound
A recreant knight, and a renegade boaster?
Better we each
Leave our bones here to bleach
And be saved, than go burn with the Paynim impostor!
For the infidel swine
Lack our spirit divine;
Their crazy old prophet prohibits them wine!
Drink, every knight!
God and my right!
We'll drive the black dogs to their kennels to-night!

SIR JAMES. Peace to thy ribaldry! Here comes the Preceptor. To saddle!

JOCELYN. Why cannot he ride with us, as a good knight and gay?

SIR JAMES. Who poises in his mind the destinies of Christendom needs not in his ear thy fool's prattle, or thy fool's face at his elbow. Though he have seen but five-and-twenty summers he is wiser than many a greybeard! See, even afar, how weightily he sits his horse. His forehead bent, his shoulders arched——

JOCELYN. The seat of a hunchback!

SIR JAMES. Like Atlas supporting the world.

SIR RAYMOND. Good Jocelyn, could thy wisest thought match his most foolish, thou would'st sit at the council.

JOCELYN. Gramercy! I smile awry. With a hawk on my wrist, and a madrigal at my lips, a prayer in the morning



given, and a kiss stolen at night, I want none of your dusty conclaves. I had as lief be a scholar.

SIR JAMES. If the world were like thee, Christendom would perish in a year and a day. Thy good knights comrades would row the Turkish galleys, and a few prize fools—such as thou—make sport for their Emirs or guard their women.

JOCELYN. And a good thing. I am weary of crusading. The sacred Sepulchre is empty—praise God, Who performed a miracle to make it so!—and we must perforce come and fill thousands more with good Christian flesh and blood, that was alive and jolly. Let us be off, though! The Preceptor sheds dullness as the sun sheds light, alike on the evil and on the good. One, two, three—I'll race you all to Sidi Khaled.

[*They go off R. toward their horses,* JOCELYN *singing as he goes.*

What is the worth
Of a hound or a hawk?
A monkey for mirth!
A parrot for talk!
Rosamond's skin
Is whiter than milk,
Seductive as sin
And softer than silk.
Would I were back
From crusade for an hour,
My limbs lying slack
In Rosamond's bower!

[*From the palms C. comes forward* LAYLAH, *veiled, with a pitcher. She attaches it to the cord of the lever and*

*dips it into the well. She looks about her, and seeing no one, raises her veil.*

LAYLAH. From the heart of the sand
The water wells up
Purer than the rain.
So in my heart
Love springs
Chaster than the grace of heaven itself.
Earth purifies
More subtly than the sea.
Only through matter
Can spirit understand itself,
Justify itself, become itself.
This mystery I heard
From the holy man of Bassu.
His beard was whiter than snow
Because it had once been blacker than burnt wood.

So will I cherish my love,
The love which I owe,
Which I give, to my husband
The noblest of the Emirs;
For I and my love and my service
And my duty
All are his.
I have no duty to God
But to obey my husband.
So my heart is freer
Than all other hearts,



As the dweller among the palms
Is freer than the wanderer in the desert.
The wanderer must find the palms;
The dweller is at ease.

My heart is a young gazelle
Leaping with love toward my husband.
He is black-bearded and bold and magnificent.
Even on the morn of the wedding he rode forth
Against the infidel.
He is so strong and brave:
God must look favourably upon him,
Bidding him return a conqueror
To the flower of his garden
That awaits his hand to pluck.

[*During the last part of the song* SIR RINALDO DE LA CHAPELLE, *preceptor of the Knights Templars, has entered L. quietly, dismounted, tethered his palfrey to palm, and approached* LAYLAH. *As she pulls the pitcher from the water he claps his hands over her eyes. She shudders with fear, but gives no sound.*

SIR RINALDO. You are a brave maiden.

LAYLAH. You are—an infidel. I had not my dagger, or your shriek — not mine — would have summoned my kin.

RINALDO. I have a score good knights within sound of my horn. And your kin are but the dotards and women and little children. Your fighting men are away.

LAYLAH. Ay, slaying your good knights.

RINALDO. It may be so. But you are my hostage.

[*He releases her. She faces him.*

LAYLAH. A worthless pledge.

RINALDO. These silks and pearls! I could draw your veil through a link in my chain mail.

LAYLAH. I am the bride of the Emir.

RINALDO. A fair bride. I guessed you his daughter.

LAYLAH. My feet have not entered his house.

RINALDO. Your feet are fair. . . . Can you tell fortunes?

LAYLAH. On the forehead of every man his destiny is written.

RINALDO. Read mine.

LAYLAH. Let me go to my house.

RINALDO. Then I will read yours. You are to be captive to a strange knight.

LAYLAH. Not to you, Sir Knight!

RINALDO. The rest is dark.

LAYLAH. You dare not touch me.

RINALDO. Sit there! [*He seats her on the wall of the well.*] Do you guess what I have been thinking as I rode through the sun to these palms?

LAYLAH. Some new plot to carry fire and sword through our quiet villages.

RINALDO. No. I was wondering why men should not live at peace. I was wondering what was the quarrel that has beggared Europe and made Asia a shambles these nigh five score years.

LAYLAH. I cannot tell you.

RINALDO. This is all I know, that in the time of Pope Urban the Second, some pilgrims to Jerusalem began to



grumble. And a madman screamed so loud on their behalf that all Europe was infected. All pilgrims grumble. All mankind grumbles. Can chivalry do nothing better than redress grievances? Progress and learning are dead in this eternal redressing. Or if we must redress grievances, let us redress the great grievance, man misunderstanding man!

LAYLAH. Let me go to my house. [*She tries to slip away.*]

RINALDO. Sit there! [*He puts her back very accurately.*] We worship one God, as you do. That is the essence of agreement. We have one prophet, as you have; there's little odds in a name. Let our fools go worship at the tomb of our prophets, as your fools go worship at the tomb of yours; and let us break the heads only of those who break the peace.

LAYLAH. Let me go to my house. You are breaking the peace now, and I will break your head.

[*She has unloosened a stone from the well and strikes him. His cheek bleeds.*]

RINALDO. [*unmoved.*] Sit there! . . . So this is my reading of the future. I who met you in hate shall leave you in love . . . and there an end of the Crusades!

LAYLAH. Love! [*bitterly sarcastic.*]

RINALDO. Love! [*enthusiastic.*]

LAYLAH. I had rather a scorpion stung me.

RINALDO. My crest is a scorpion. [*He points to the golden bejewelled crest upon his light helmet.*] I am thirsty. Give me water.

LAYLAH. I would give water to a thirsty dog. [*She pours water into his hands.*]

RINALDO. For water I will give you fire. Twelve hundred years ago came peace on earth and goodwill toward men through a virgin sacrifice. . . . History repeats itself.

LAYLAH. I am on the edge of the well; but I shall not fall in. You are a renegade, I see; and, I think, a monster. You are mad with pride and conceit of your own wisdom. So I know you for a fool.

RINALDO. The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.

LAYLAH. Prate on! Even the dust mocks at you.

RINALDO. There are snakes in the dust.

LAYLAH. What do you mean?

RINALDO. I saw it in your eyes three minutes since. I did not need to turn my head to know that on the horizon gallop your husband and his band.

LAYLAH. You are clever.

RINALDO. And you were forced despite yourself to drop a hint that might warn me to rejoin my knights.

LAYLAH. No!

RINALDO. Yes. By that I knew that you loved me.

LAYLAH. And by this (*she strikes him*) know that I hate you.

RINALDO. You are too young. I have seen lions.

LAYLAH. You are a savage.

RINALDO. Nature is savage. Passion is savage. The God alike of Jews and Moslems delights in death. Or why are men and beasts slain in His honour? Brutal force is at the heart of things. Man is dragged crying from his mother's womb in dire agony; man fights his surroundings —the nearer they are the more bitterly must he fight them



—and at last he is hurled fighting into the hungry mouth of death.

LAYLAH. The cloud grows.

RINALDO. Indeed you love me, if you bid me waste no time.

LAYLAH. Oh no! . . .

I must respect you. You treat me as if I were a pebble in the sand. Nothing moves you.

RINALDO. Love moves me.

LAYLAH. We are opposites in all.

RINALDO. So Nature hath ordained. Man hates his neighbour: but when he finds his opposite, he loves it. All joy is the warfare of enemies, from the clash of lance and sabre, when Saracen meets Christian on the plain to—this, when Christian crushes Saracen in his arms and——

[*He clasps her.*

LAYLAH. Oh! [*The pitcher is overturned and the water flows out.*

RINALDO. I love you.

LAYLAH. I am a speck of dust in the simoom.

RINALDO. Let it whirl! There is no more Christian and Saracen, but man and woman—as it was in the beginning and for ever shall be.

*He has borne her in his arms to the tall grasses. She struggles uselessly. They are now invisible.*

LAYLAH. Help me, O God of Battles!

RINALDO. God is love.

[*Music. From the well issues a nymph dressed in silver and azure gauze, with jewels and roses in her hair. After her a cluster of children.*]

THE NYMPH [*sings.*]

In the well
Where I dwell,
It is cool, it is dusk ;
But the truth
Of my youth
Is a palace of musk.
Truth comes bubbling to my brim ;
Light and night are one to Him !

In the dark
You may mark
The slow ooze of my springs,
But you know
Not the glow
Where the soul of me sings.
Truth comes bubbling to my brim ;
Life and death are one to Him !

There is cold
In the old
Grey gloom of my caves ;
There is heat
In the beat
Of my passionate waves.
Truth comes bubbling to my brim ;
Love and hate are one to Him.

[*They dance and return to the well.* R. *and* L. *are now seen behind the grasses, she sobbing upon his shoulder.*]



RINALDO. The cloud blackens all the sky. Laylah !

[*He takes the scorpion from his helmet.*

Keep this token of me.

LAYLAH. For a token of hate and of revenge !

RINALDO. As you will. But the Crusades are ended !

[*He draws her to the well, and lays her down. With her arms on the low wall, and her face hidden, she sobs.* RINALDO *takes his palfrey, and, with one glance over his shoulder towards the enemy and another to* LAYLAH, *rides off, driving the spurs into his horse.* LAYLAH *remains sobbing. After a long interval she half-rises, and stretching her arms after him, calls brokenly :*

LAYLAH. Come back ! . . . Come back ! . . .

[*Sobs again take her more violently than ever. She struggles to her feet, holds out the scorpion crest and calls :*]

Come back ! . . . Come back !

[*She collapses. Dead silence. After a little the distant galloping of horses is heard. It grows louder and louder.* LAYLAH *rises, mistress of herself, kisses the golden scorpion and hides it at her heart, and refills the pitcher.*

[*Enter a band of Saracens, who dismount. Their leader, the* EMIR SAID OMAR, *rushes forward to the well.*

SAID OMAR. Victory ! we have chased the infidels three days, and the vultures of the desert are gorged, and the jackals burst with fatness. My gazelle, didst thou languish for me ? My rose, my tulip, my anemone, slim palm of the oasis, sweet water of the well ! We shall feast to-night,

little one, star of the night, beautiful young moon over the sand-dunes!

[*He clasps her in his arms.*

LAYLAH [*tonelessly*]. Victory! Ay, victory is sweet. We shall feast to-night.

[*She shudders.*

SAID OMAR [*seeing that all is not well*]. What is it? What is it?

LAYLAH. I have had evil dreams.

SAID OMAR [*to his men*]. On to the houses! We must feast; we must sleep.

[*He takes* LAYLAH *on his saddlebow.*]

You must sleep, whisper of the west wind!

LAYLAH. I shall have evil dreams.

SAID OMAR. No! you shall not sleep to-night, white fairy of Paradise, black-eyed gazelle of the wilderness!

LAYLAH. Be gentle with me . . . I ache . . . I have been stung by a scorpion.

SAID OMAR. There are no scorpions in the winter. Where is the wound?

[LAYLAH *puts her hand to her heart, and falls fainting limp across the saddlebow.*]

Call Ibrahim, the wise physician! On to the houses!

[*Exeunt. The voice of the nymph of the well, faintly from below.*

"Truth comes bubbling to my brim:
Love and Hate are one to Him!"]

CURTAIN.

## PERSONS OF THE TRAGEDY

### ACT II

LAYLAH, *wife of Sidi Omar*
SLIMAN, *her son by Sir Rinaldo de la Chapelle*
OTHMAN, AKBAR, MOHAMMED, *her sons by Sidi Omar*
FATMA, *her aged Nubian nurse*
LEDMIYA, *a young handmaiden, musical. Other waiting-women. Pipe-slaves*
ABDUL KHAN, *an eunuch. Other eunuchs*
ACHMET, *equerry to Sliman*
A FAIR-HAIRED CHRISTIAN MAIDEN, *daughter to Sir Rinaldo de la Chapelle*
MESSENGERS
THE POPULACE

## ACT II

*Twenty years later. An Oriental Palace in a city near Jerusalem; the Hall of Audience. In the throne is* LAYLAH *veiled. Around her are waiting-women and her old nurse* FATMA. *At the door an eunuch on guard with drawn scimitar.*

LEDMIYA [*a young girl with a stringed instrument*].

As the flower waits for the rain,
As the lover waits for the moon,
We wait, we wait, an hungry pain,
For tidings from the battle plain—
If those we love are hurt or slain,
Or if the Lord hath smitten again
The legions of the Cross, and hewn
A path of blood where glory flares.
The sabre strikes, the trumpet blares,
The warhorse neighs,—Oh let us see
The Crescent borne to victory!

LAYLAH. Is there no news?

FATMA. It is rumoured that the battle has begun.

LEDMIYA. Under the very walls of Jerusalem!

ABDUL KHAN. Within the southern gate.

FATMA. Many, many will fall. Alas, alas!



LAYLAH. Sliman is strong and brave — my splendid boy.

FATMA. Ay, there are hairs on his chin. But the strongest and the bravest fall first.

LAYLAH. Thou ominous owl! Be silent, or I will have thee whipped.

FATMA. Oh! Oh! indeed I only say what we all know. If he should die indeed, thou mayst have Sidi Omar left, thy dear lord. And Othman, and Akbar, and Mohammed!

LAYLAH. Sliman is my first-born.

FATMA. Ay, he is not like his brothers. He is square and solid-set. He is more like the cedar than the palm.

LAYLAH. Sidi Omar's mother was a princess from Lebanon.

FATMA. He is silent and stern.

LAYLAH. Sidi Omar's father was the holiest man of Syria. He lived alone forty years in the mountain.

FATMA. He is relentless in anger, and obeys not. One would say there was Christian blood in him.

LAYLAH. On the night of his begetting there was Christian blood on Sidi Omar's hands.

FATMA. He is as fair as a Christian.

LAYLAH. The men of Sidi Omar's tribe are white men, thou wizened old black witch.

FATMA. Ah! Sidi Omar! Sidi Omar! Sidi Omar! Happy the prince whose wife is as faithful as thou. Thou canst not open thy mouth without uttering his name.

LAYLAH. Do not take it in thine, mother of lies!

FATMA. My mouth has been shut these twenty years.

LAYLAH. What? Any time these twenty years thou hast

deserved a beating, old scandal-monger! And often thou hast had it.

FATMA. It was not a beating that thou didst earn, princess. Many a time I have fetched water from the well by——

LAYLAH. Abdul Khan! take out this prating hag and beat her soundly. Fatma! this is the last time I leave thy lying tongue in that camel-lipped old face of an unbelieving Jinneeyah!

[*The eunuch drags her out, screaming and scolding.*

What news? What news?

LEDMIYA [*at the window*]. A horseman gallops from Jerusalem.

LAYLAH Oh, quick, quick, quick, his tidings! For pity's sake. Would it were the winged horse of brass! I am distracted. Mind me not! I can wait. A queen must be able to wait.

LEDMIYA. He is quite near now. And in the distance is a glint, and a faint shouting. I think the battle is coming here.

LAYLAH. Oh, we cannot have been beaten! Sliman is so strong and brave.

FATMA [*re-entering*]. All is lost! All is lost! Let us all flee!

LAYLAH. Peace, parrot! [*Enter Messenger.*

MESSENGER. Pardon, princess!

LAYLAH. Thy news, or thy head shall pay it.

MESSENGER. Glorious news! Sidi Omar hath entered Jerusalem, and sacked the House of the Knights Templars, and the House of the Knights Hospitallers, and——



LEDMIYA [*at window*]. Oh, I can see the spears shining through the dust of the horses!

MESSENGER. —but—

LAYLAH. Speak, if thou wouldst ever speak again!

MESSENGER. But the Knights of Malta appeared in great strength, riding from the valley on their noble chargers, armed at all points—

LAYLAH. Yes? Yes?

MESSENGER. So that we judged it best to fall back upon the reserves. The Maltese fell upon us—you may see them fighting now.

LAYLAH. What news of my brave Sliman?

FATMA. And Sidi Omar? And Othman? And Akbar? And Mohammed?

LAYLAH. Peace. What news?

MESSENGER. Sidi Omar is hurt.

LAYLAH. And Sliman?

MESSENGER. I do not know, princess.

LAYLAH. Get forth, back to the fight. Reward him, ye!

FATMA. Reward for such bad news! What is the world coming to? In my young days—

LAYLAH. Such withered weeds were burnt.

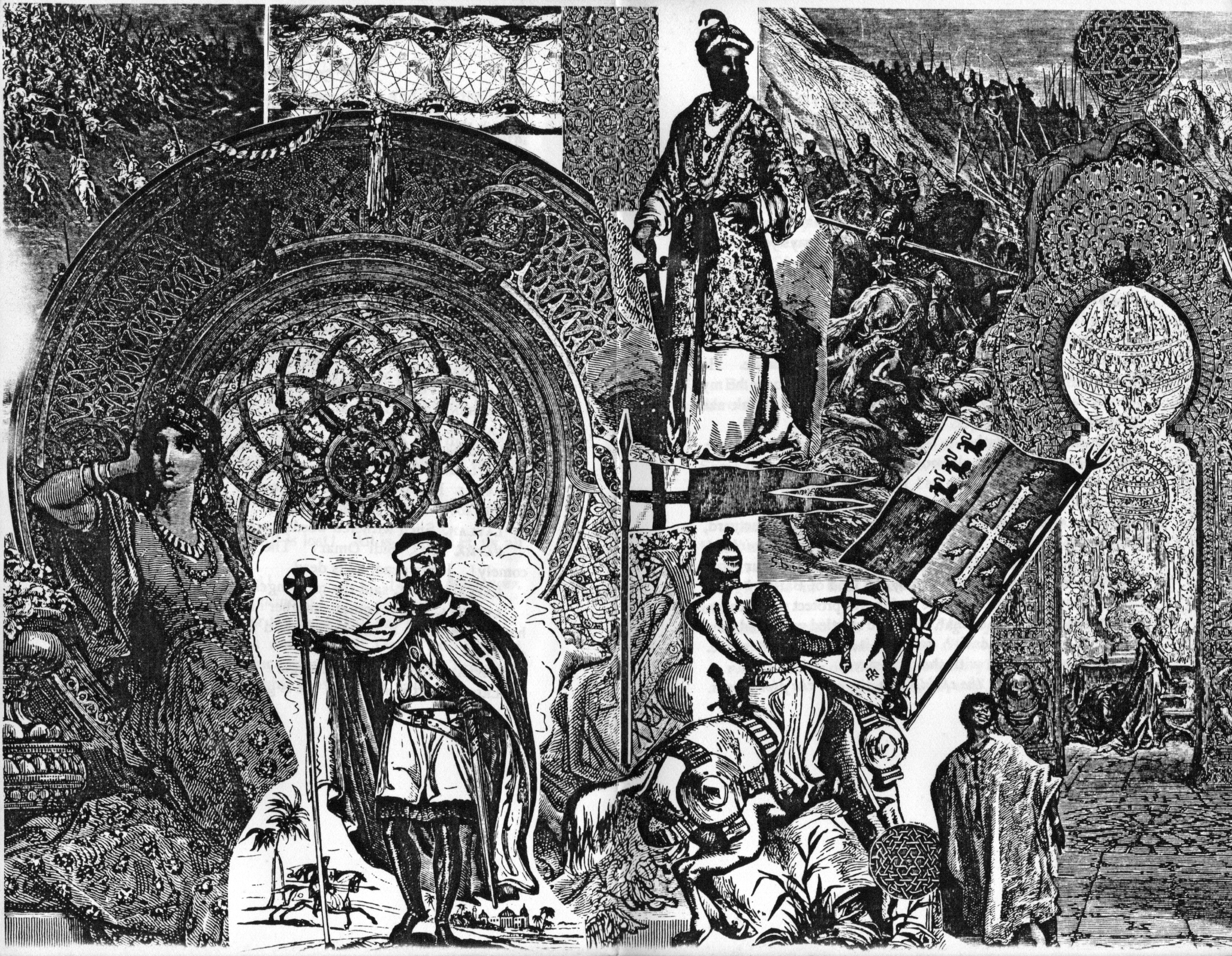
FATMA. Alas, Sidi Omar! The strong, the brave, the comely! He is dead, he is dead.

LAYLAH. Hurt, said the messenger.

LEDMIYA. Now comes another from the fight, riding hard. He bears a fair-haired child across the saddle. Oh, do look!

LAYLAH. Is there no messenger?

LEDMIYA. It is Achmet! It is good Achmet!



LAYLAH. The equerry of Prince Sliman! Out of the way, girl! [*She pushes* LEDMIYA *roughly from the window.*]

Booty! He must be well and victorious! Bring him in! Now we shall know—good tidings! good tidings!

[*She paces up and down impatiently. Enter* ACHMET *with a young girl.*

ACHMET. The duty of my Lord! Good tidings from the battle. The spoils of my lord's spear! He prays you to keep her among the women until he return and place her in his harem.

LAYLAH. A man! He is a man! I have borne a man-child, a lion, a conqueror!

ACHMET. Indeed, he has slain twenty Christians with his own hand. And still he is in the front of the battle. He laughed: "To-day I am a man, I need thee no more; be my chamberlain and carry this toy to my mother." I think she is a princess.

THE CHILD. My father is the Grand Master of the Temple, and he is coming to cut all your heads off.

LAYLAH. Leave her with us! Ride back on a fresh horse, and bear aid to the prince. [*Exit* ACHMET

LEDMIYA [*at window*]. There is a tumult in the courtyard, and a great wailing. [*Wailing without.*

LAYLAH. The sun will be set in an hour. One hour more of favour and protection for my boy, oh God of Battles!

THE CHILD. Our God is love! He will protect me, I know.

LAYLAH. Imp! Be silent! How you startled me! And now I look at you—what is it? what is it? You frighten me. Take her away—there, with the pipe-slaves.

[FATMA *takes the child down stage to the pipe-slaves.*



THE CHILD. You are ugly, you black creature!

LEDMIYA. Oh! Oh!

[*She runs to* LAYLAH *and hides in the folds of her dress.*

LAYLAH What now?

LEDMIYA. They are bringing in a corpse.

LAYLAH. Oh my God—if Achmet lied!

[*The door opens. The corpse of* SIDI OMAR *is brought in by six eunuchs.*]

Ah! [*She goes down hall.*] Lay him there! [*She rends her veil.*] Sidi Omar, these twenty years have I been wedded to thee and thou hast not known my heart! Leave me, that I may bewail him as is fitting.

[*All depart but* FATMA and LEDMIYA *and the* PIPE-SLAVES *with their prisoner.*]

Fatma, do thou lament. I await tidings of the battle. Is there sign of a messenger?

[FATMA *goes to corpse and mutters over it.*

LEDMIYA [*at window*]. There are many that make hither. Some bear the dead away—two, three, five, eight, oh so many! Some ride weary or wounded . . .

LAYLAH. Some ride like messengers?

LEDMIYA. No. Yes, one. No, he has fallen from his horse, and lies still. [*Wailing without.*

LAYLAH. Go, bid those fools be quiet. Is there not enough woe in this house but that their shrieks should edge it?

[LEDMIYA *goes out. The wailing stops. Then suddenly it begins again more loudly than before.*

FATMA. More death! More misery!

[LEDMIYA *returns, and goes again to window.*

LAYLAH. Silence, thou blotchy spider! Thou baboon of ugliness! Mother of curses!

[*Four eunuchs bring in the corpse of the boy* MOHAMMED.

Ah God! my youngest, my own delicate darling! Lay him by his sire! [*She goes down and bends over him.*] Was not this arm too tender to bear a sword? Why would he go to the battle? He was made for luting and the zephyr. His eyes were larger and lovelier than the gazelle's! His eyebrows were blacker than the kohl upon mine eyelids. Alas, my baby! My young one, my tender one! . . . Is there tidings, girl?

LEDMIYA. One rides fast. His horse stumbles at the gate. He leaps clear. The horse has fallen. He runs hither.

LAYLAH. News! News!

[LEDMIYA *goes out.* *Enter a Messenger.*

2ND MESSENGER. The duty of my lord to his mother! We keep the hounds at bay now. Prince Sliman is like the Angel of Death. No man can stand before him. The Christians tremble, and give back when he rides against them.

LAYLAH. A man! A man! He is not hurt?

2ND MESSENGER. Scratches. As if a lion were at play with kittens!

LAYLAH. I am glad he has scratches. Every one shall be sung by the poets as if it were the axe-blow of old Duke Walter.

[*Again the wailing surges in the courtyard.* LEDMIYA *rushes in.*

LEDMIYA. Alas, alas, my queen! I cannot say it! Do not ask me to say it! . . . They are bringing him in.

LAYLAH. Who? Devil-child! [*She strikes her.* *Four eunuchs bring in the corpse of* AKBAR.] Forgive me! I am not myself. I am not a woman. Lay him there, beside his



father! [*She goes down to corpse.*] Akbar, my little one! Strong wast thou and greater than thy brothers. Thou hadst the hawk's eye, and the deer's foot; and thine hand on the bowstring was surer and stronger than thy father's! Three, of my five, my five that should guard me and cherish me! Three taken, and two left! Yet, while one is left . . .

LEDMIYA [*at window*]. The battle is fiercer every moment. Hundreds and hundreds must be killed. But the press is thinner. I can make out the banners. Oh! I can see Sliman's banner!

LAYLAH. Let me see! let me see! [*She rushes to window.*] Yes! it flows free in the good air! How fierce he fights. I cannot see him; but he must be there. Yes! it moves forward now; the Christians part before him like the air before an arrow. The dust swallows all up again.

[*Wailing rises without, louder and more insistent.*

A curse upon these fools! But for them I could hear his battle-cry. . . . Has he ever cried, and I not heard him? Oh, why did the strange knight not bear me on his palfrey? I must be mad.

FATMA. You must be mad!

LAYLAH. Bewail the dead, thou bald vulture, shaggy toothless crone, dam of perdition! There floats the banner again, above them all. The Templar's banner dips; some one has cut through the staff. The Christians are in rout. . . .

[*Four eunuchs enter, bearing the corpse of* OTHMAN.

FATMA. Othman is dead! Alas! Alas! Weep, mother, three brave boys beside their sire! All dead! dead!

LAYLAH [*not turning from window*]. Lay him beside his father and his two brothers! Brave banner! Brave

banner! We go through the Christians as a wedge cleaves a plank, as a ship cleaves the sea, as a bird cleaves the air! Victory! Sliman! Sliman! Drive them, like cattle, to their walls again!

FATMA. She has always been mad! I wonder what really happened.

LAYLAH. The sun is setting in blood. There are storm-clouds lit like burning charcoal blown upon by the mightiest of the Djinn. I cannot see the banner. It grows dark. They must stop fighting soon. They will withdraw to their walls—nay, let them camp among the dead! Come back with tidings! Tell me, Sliman is safe. Ah! there sounds the horn of truce.

THE CHILD. My father is the Grand Master of the Temple, and he will come and cut all your heads off.

LAYLAH [*goes down to her*]. Thou preposterous little curd of sour milk! Thy father is dead! I saw the Banner of the Temple snap like a dry twig. My brave son Sliman cut it at a single blow. He will whip home the dogs, your friends, and you shall be his toy to play with and break and make sport of. He will twist your skinny arm—so!

[*She catches the child's wrist, twists it, and makes her scream.*

Spindle-legged little spider! [*The child bites her wrist.*] Venomous as a scorpion!

THE CHILD. My father's crest is a scorpion.

LAYLAH. No! No! it cannot be. I am mad. I hear a strange thing. Now I know what I saw in your face. Child! Child! I am sorry I hurt you. I want to be friends with you. I am all-powerful here. No harm shall come to you! His child! Come and kiss me! [*The child shrinks away.*]



No! I am sorry. I am your good friend. I will take you back to your father. He is not dead. I am sure he is not dead.

THE CHILD. I do not understand you.

LAYLAH. Oh, you shall understand. Your father will make you understand! [*changing again to roughness*]. What was your mother like? Had she your golden hair, and the complexion like a shaved sow? And the simper, and the grey eyes? I have grey eyes too; but mine are steel-grey, true as steel; and yours are chill and watery. But you have your father's temper, and his silence, and his will.

THE CHILD. What do you know of my father?

LAYLAH. Nothing. I only jested; I wanted to try you, to hear what you would say. Tell me about your mother.

THE CHILD. She was a fair and noble lady. She died when I was born.

LAYLAH. Thank God!

THE CHILD. I do not understand.

LAYLAH. Oh! will your father say, "I do not understand?" What am I? Yet I gave him my greatest gift—and I have yet a greater gift to give him—and I have a gift that he has always had and I have never lost.

THE CHILD. Are you an enchantress? You do not talk sense.

LAYLAH. You are the child of an enchanter.

THE CHILD. My father burns enchanters alive when he catches them.

LEDMIYA [*at window*]. There is a great concourse without. The men are returning. They ride slowly, as in peace.

But one rides fast, for I can hear his hoofs ring the gallop above all the trampling.

LAYLAH. It is Sliman! His horse has silver shoes. Wait there, child! I have joy for you to come.

[*A horse is heard galloping into the courtyard, and a battle-cry, La Allah illa Allah, rings out in a boy's clear voice, a voice weary yet supremely happy.*

[*Almost beside herself*] Sliman! to me! to your mother!

[*Sliman enters, in his right hand his sword still dripping blood.*

SLIMAN. Splendid fun, mother! We should have had the whole city, but those cursed Knights of Malta threatened our flank. And father told me I was a better leader for withdrawing than if I had gone on and taken the city. There! Aha! little one! you are caged safely, canary. Thanks, mother! Don't kiss me. I'm all blood.

[*She smothers him with kisses.*

LAYLAH. Oh, you're wounded. Ledmiya, the kerchief, quick. And the Arabian oil, and the balsam.

SLIMAN. Nonsense, mother, it's nothing. But think! I slew twenty knights—they haven't the strength of babies. It was like cracking eggshells. All except one. He was as strong as I, but not so quick. So I cut him down, and took his crest for a brooch for you, mother dear.

[*He holds out a golden crest.*

LAYLAH. The scorpion!

THE CHILD. The scorpion! [*She retires and watches.*

LAYLAH. Boy, you have killed your father.

[*She stands thunderstuck.*

SLIMAN. Oh no, mother! Father and the boys all died in



the mêlée when we were thrown back on the reserve. The Knights of St John charged in line. It was rough-and-tumble for a few minutes, indeed it was. When I got out, their banners were swept far down the fighting line. There was a mess of varlets between us; before I could sweep them away the Knights had rolled over Sidi Omar and my brothers —the whole wing was destroyed. I rallied the right on the centre, and—why, mother, you're not listening!

LAYLAH [*taking his sword*]. This sword killed your father. Listen! Sidi Omar was not your father. Your father ravished me, a virgin and a princess, and left me only this for token. [*She takes the jewelled scorpion from her breast.*] I took it for hate and revenge; wherein I lied, for I loved him, and I love him. God has punished my lie, making you—the token of love—the minister of revenge. So then—be he avenged!

[*She strikes the neck of* SLIMAN *and he falls dead. She stands stupefied.*

THE CHILD [*coming forward and picking up the scorpion that* SLIMAN *had in his hand*]. I thank thee, lady. My brother is avenged.

[*She dips the scorpion in his blood and fastens it in her dress.*

LAYLAH [*shortly*]. Your brother lies there dead.

THE CHILD. I am sorry, if he was my brother. He was a brave boy. He picked me up and threw me to a servant just as if I had been an old tabard.

LAYLAH. Your father's trick!

THE CHILD. I do not understand.

LAYLAH. Understand this. I have slain my son because

he slew his father; and all I look for is for some one to slay me also!

THE CHILD. But you say his father is my father.

LAYLAH. Was! was!

THE CHILD. But it is my brother who was slain by Sliman. My father is in Rome; he is coming hither with the next fair wind.

LAYLAH. Fair wind! God! It is I then who have slain our son. The scorpion! My sole token.

[*She falls on* SLIMAN'S *corpse.*]

My son! only son of my love! one sole jewel of the world wert thou. And the accursèd scorpion has betrayed me. Oh, let me from this hour throw off all womanhood, all kindness, all compassion—all but my love that has made my heart a hell. From this hell spring forth fiery scorpions—Eunuchs! Girls! let us be men! Take swords! take spears! Truce or no truce, night or no night, out to the field. Let us slay the dogs as they lie. God, hear me! Make me mightier than Semiramis! Hate and revenge! Battle and death! To arms! To arms! Out into the night!

[*During this speech the eunuchs, girls, and slaves, catching her madness, have all armed themselves from the trophies on the wall. They troop out, running and jostling.* LAYLAH *turns to the Name of God above the throne, and waving her sabre, cries:*]

Hear me, hear me, thou God of Battles! [*Exit.*

THE CHILD. God is love. And he has protected me.

[*Alone among the corpses.*]

CURTAIN.

## PERSONS OF THE TRAGEDY

### ACT III

SIR RINALDO DE LA CHAPELLE, *Grand Master of the Temple*
A BISHOP
REPRESENTATIVE OF THE KING OF JERUSALEM
THE GRAND MASTER OF THE KNIGHTS OF ST JOHN
THE GRAND MASTER OF THE KNIGHTS OF MALTA
CLERKS, USHERS, ADVOCATES, *etc.*
TORTURERS
A PHYSICIAN
THE KING OF JERUSALEM
MANY DIGNITARIES AND THEIR LADIES
THE CROWD
ISAAC, *a Jew*
AN URCHIN
LAYLAH, *now known as Princess Koureddin*

## ACT III

SCENE I: *Twenty years later. Jerusalem. The Council Chamber of the Grand Tribunal. A Bishop, as Grand Inquisitor. On his right,* RINALDO; *now become Grand Master of the Temple; on his left the Grand Master of the Knights of Malta. Beyond these, the Grand Master of the Knights of St John and the representative of the King of Jerusalem. Clerks, Ushers, etc. A military guard. Clerical functionaries of all sorts. Under guard* LAYLAH, *unveiled, scarred with sword-cuts, a stern savage virago.*

BISHOP. Let the indictment be read.

THE CLERK OF THE COURT. Princess Kahar-ud-din or Koureddin, you are arraigned of witchcraft. Firstly that on the night of the victory to the Crusaders' arms, by God's grace, during a period of truce, you did sally forth with a horde of slaves and women, by many accounted devils, and did attack and destroy the armies of the Crusaders.

PROSECUTOR. We say this was by witchcraft. How else could a rabble of slaves and women defeat the heroes who, though barely two thousand strong, had that day destroyed four hundred thousand and above of your best warriors?

LAYLAH. On our side was the God of Battles.

BISHOP. My daughter, God is love.



LAYLAH. Lord Bishop, I have heard that phrase thrice in three score years. The first time a man used it to destroy a child: the second time a child used it to murder her brother; this time you use it to torture and burn an honourable adversary.

BISHOP. Child of the devil, you blaspheme. Be silent! On the first count, guilty.

[*Several* JUDGES, *but not* RINALDO, *echo* "*Guilty.*" *Throughout this scene* RINALDO *sits absolutely silent and motionless, except that now and then he makes a gesture of weariness and impatience.*

THE CLERK. Secondly, that you have in these twenty years past gathered a band of lawless ruffians, and constantly assailed the defenders of the sepulchre, with malice and deadly hatred.

PROSECUTOR. We say that no woman could do thus, unless aided by Satan.

LAYLAH. Dido, Queen of Carthage, was renowned as a warrior, and Semiramis, Queen of Nineveh.

BISHOP. Both pagans. On the second count, guilty.

[JUDGES *echo* "*Guilty.*"

CLERK. Thirdly, that you did discard the modesty of womanhood and put on armour enchanted.

PROSECUTOR. We say that, forasmuch as many good knights have ridden against it with sword and lance and not availed to pierce it, this was by magic and forbidden art.

LAYLAH [*contemptuously*]. It was good armour.

BISHOP. The prisoner mocks us. On the third count, guilty. [JUDGES *echo* "*Guilty.*"

CLERK. Fourthly, that you did at midnight upon Martinmas,

eighteen years ago, in the valley of Hinnom, on the stone called Succoth, bind yourself in a diabolical pact with Satan, whereby he granted the power to change your sex at will, since which time you have become the father of an innumerable brood of devils, and in particular have travelled by night in the form of an owl to assault the virtue of many holy servants of the True Faith, notably at the Convent of St Anne in this city, whereby the bodies and souls of the nuns were possessed and destroyed.

PROSECUTOR. We say this is plain witchcraft.

[LAYLAH *takes no notice.*

BISHOP. Silence under such a charge is contumacious, and equivalent to confession. On the fourth count, guilty.

[JUDGES *echo "Guilty."*

CLERK. Fifthly, that you do take the form of a bat, and suck the blood of sleeping children, and moreover have bewitched divers cows to the prejudice of the Holy Orders of Knights Hospitaller and others, lawful owners of the aforesaid cows.

PROSECUTOR. All clear marks of a witch!

LAYLAH. Your Saviour sent devils into swine.

BISHOP. Blasphemy on blasphemy! [*crosses himself*]. Sure only the devil could speak thus. On the fifth count, guilty.

[JUDGES *echo "Guilty."*

CLERK. Sixthly—

BISHOP. Stay, gentle sir. Have we not heard enough? Must the ears of the Court be further polluted with a recital of these abominations?

G. M. OF ST J. We have heard enough.

G. M. OF MALTA. Enough, my lord Bishop.



REP. OF K. OF JERUSALEM. Enough.

BISHOP [*to* RINALDO]. And you, Grand Master?

RINALDO. More than enough.

BISHOP. My beloved daughter! God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should repent and be saved. It is therefore the most merciful provision of our just and merciful law that none be condemned without confession. Let me urge you to make peace with God and man.

LAYLAH. Peace, peace! when there is no peace.

BISHOP. There spoke a lost soul. Confess, my dear daughter. Break the bonds of Satan at the last.

LAYLAH [*straining at her handcuffs*]. They hold fast.

BISHOP. We are not moved by insult from our most merciful purpose. Summon the executioners.

[*A* CLERK *goes with the order. Enter torturers with their implements. Also a Physician.*

LAYLAH. Your steel against my will. It is a fair bout.

BISHOP. Apply the thumbscrews.

[*The torturers bind* LAYLAH *and apply the torture.*

[*To G. M. of St John*] My cook is a great knave, you must know. I bade him prepare me a pasty of quails toward to-night, and the varlet swears there are no quails on the market. Now this morning riding I saw quails with these eyes. The air was as thick with them as when the Children of Israel were miraculously fed.

G. M. OF ST J. A new miracle if the knave escape. But will not your lordship sup with me to-night?

BISHOP. Thanks, good Grand Master.

FIRST TORTURER. My lord, I think I heard a sigh.

PHYSICIAN. Only a natural motion of the body, by your

leave, my lord, I venture to opine. Her lip is bitten through.

BISHOP. What wickedness! Truly, my lords, Satan hath great power in these latter days, spoken of by St Paul in his Epistle to the Romans. Force the mouth open.

[*A torturer obeys.*

PHYSICIAN. Pardon, my lord, if she utters no sound. She hath swallowed her tongue, a notorious devilry of Arabian enchanters. By your leave, my lord, the tongue should be pulled forward. Her soul would be lost (begging your Lordship's pardon) should she choke now.

BISHOP. Rightly said. And on your head be it! Redouble the thumbscrews.

[*A torturer pulls her tongue forward with pincers.* LAYLAH *groans.*

TORTURER. I certainly heard somewhat.

BISHOP. Articulate?

TORTURER. I dare hardly say, my lord.

BISHOP. The needles.

TORTURER. They are white-hot. How many, my lord?

BISHOP. Three behind each eyeball should suffice.

TORTURER. It is done. There is a sound like "wa."

PHYSICIAN [*in triumph*]. "Aiwa," my lord Bishop, "aiwa" without a doubt. It is "yes" in their heathen tongue.

BISHOP. I heard it. We all heard it. Glory to God! Release the prisoner.

[LAYLAH *is released. She is unconscious and falls limp.*]

Sir Clerk, write down that the prisoner made full confession and repented of her crimes, desiring to be reconciled



with God and His holy church. My own chaplain shall baptize her and administer the sacrament. Glory to God in the Highest for one more soul torn from the grasp of Satan.

My beloved daughter, behold you now at peace with God and with His holy church. Your sins are forgiven you. But the secular arm is not yet satisfied; your crimes, the crimes to which you have confessed, must be expiated according to law. The sentence of the Court is that you be handed over to the secular arm; and I beg of you [*turning to the Representative of the King of Jerusalem*], the Court begs of you, that you will deal mercifully with the prisoner, without shedding of blood.

REPRESENTATIVE OF K. OF J. A stake shall be prepared. [*To the soldiers*] Remove the prisoner to the strongest dungeon, and let the guard be trebled. Witchcraft has many tricks.

BISHOP. The Court is dissolved. My lords, will you please breakfast with me? [JUDGES *murmur assent.*

RINALDO. Thank you, my lord, but I have my bellyful.

[*The others exchange glances and go out.* RINALDO *is left alone. He goes to the place of torture.*]

There is blood on the floor. It fell from her lip that she bit through. . . . Pilate washed his hands in water. Had I power I would wash mine in blood, in the blood of these monsters of cruelty—no, of stupidity. But I am too old. I gave all for power, and I used all my power to reconcile, to heal, to amend the matter. So at the end I find myself a toothless dog. Bigotry I could have beaten: it is this mountain of stupidity that crushes me. Shall I summon my

knights and join the Saracen army? That were only to change the balance, to change the cross, soaked in the blood of humanity, for the crescent, pale flame of madness. Oh could I destroy both! . . . Forty years ago I strove to reconcile them by love, by sympathy. What came of it? A frolic crime, sterile as all my thoughts are. Nothing, nothing has ever come of anything that I have ever done. Yet that came nearest to success; for it was my one touch of love. I have never loved since, as most surely I had never loved before. She is dead long ago. . . . Oh, these years of carnage! The Holy Sepulchre that hid the body of Him whose innocent blood was shed is not worth one drop of innocent blood—like this. [*He bows, takes the blood on his finger and crosses his forehead with it.*] The brand of Cain! Would it have saved her if I had thrust my poniard into that hypocrite's throat? I can do nothing but wait, binding chosen knights with an oath—the oath of the Knights of the Royal Mystery . . . that God is one; that to love God and man is enough. . . . Peace, Tolerance, Truth. Paul may plant, and Apollos may water, but God giveth the increase. If I cry out "Down with tyranny! Down with superstition and imposture!" the first knight thinks me mad; the second that I have some politic baseness toward; the third that I mean Saracens; the fourth suspects the truth, and destroys me. Anon . . . Anon . . .

[*He goes sorrowfully out.*

CURTAIN.



SCENE II. *A few days later. A public place in Jerusalem. In the midst a stake with faggots. Seats for the dignitaries, some thirty or forty of whom are present, most with their ladies. There is present moreover a motley crowd of all classes of society, Christian and Saracen. Note especially* ISAAC, *a fat good-tempered Jew, and an* URCHIN *of some twelve years old. In front are jugglers, tumblers, singers and dancers, hucksters, etc., all of whom ply their trade merrily. The Official Procession now enters, the guard clearing away these folk. All take their seats, chatting. The Bishop is enthroned, in full canonicals. He is supported by three acolytes, bearing bell, book and candle.* LAYLAH *brought in and bound to stake. The Bishop rises at a signal from the King, and begins a long declamation in Latin. The general confusion gradually subsides.*

URCHIN. Uncle Isaac, take me on thy stout shoulder. I want to see the witch burnt.

ISAAC. All in good time. The holy Bishop is still cursing, I think.

BISHOP [*concluding, raises his voice to drown the general conversation*]. In Sæcula Sæculorum. Amen!

ALL. Amen!

K. OF J. [*enthroned near the Bishop*]. Let the sentence be executed.

[*The Executioner brings forward his torch, which he lights at the* BISHOP'S *candle.*

BISHOP [*blessing*]. Absolvo te.

[*The Executioner thrusts his torch into the pyre. The*

*flames spring up. At this moment the wind suddenly rises in a fury, and the sky darkens. There is no light but the flicker of the straw.*]

[*All present are alarmed; many cry out.*

BISHOP. Witchcraft! [*He cowers on his throne.*]

[*The people move confusedly about, some trying to escape, others to get better places.*

K. OF J. Keep order, guards!

[*The guards restore order after a struggle.*

URCHIN. O do lift me up, Uncle Isaac!

ISAAC. What do you want to see a witch burnt for, boy?

[*He takes the boy on his shoulder.*

URCHIN. O, it's jolly!

ISAAC. Well then, you're a fool for your pains. This woman isn't a witch at all. But she was a better and braver soldier than any of their knights, so when they caught her at last—there you are!

URCHIN. She's a Saracen, isn't she?

ISAAC. Yes. If we only had a Jewess now-a-days like her! There was Deborah once, and Jael, and Judith. But the glory is departed, boy, the glory is departed.

URCHIN. I'm a Saracen, you know.

ISAAC. You're a heavy little old Man of the Sea!

URCHIN. The flames are creeping up her body now. Oh! I'm so angry; I'm so angry.

ISAAC. You mustn't be angry, or you'll never be fat.

URCHIN. I don't wan't to be fat. I wan't to kill all the people.

ISAAC. Well, well, you shall one day, if you're good.

URCHIN. Yes, I will.



ISAAC. There, the wind has blown her robe open. What's that? Diamonds, by Abraham! What waste! What terrible waste!

RINALDO [*leaping from his seat*]. The scorpion!

[*He rushes to the pyre and clasps* LAYLAH *in his arms.*]

Laylah! my one love!

LAYLAH, Rinaldo!

RINALDO. We might not live together. God is love; He lets us die together.

LAYLAH. Together at last!

RINALDO. You and I, love, you and I.

LAYLAH. You and I.

[*The flames blaze to heaven with a roar.* RINALDO *and* LAYLAH *are blotted out.*

URCHIN. What has he done?

ISAAC. He was trying to save his diamonds. That was the Grand Master of the Temple. It was his crest; she must have stolen it. A diamond scorpion! Oh dear! Oh dear!

URCHIN. I'll be a dragon, with wings. They shan't burn me; I'll burn them.

ISAAC. Of course, you will, you little fire-eater. What's your great name?

URCHIN. Saladin.

CURTAIN.

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